

FOREWORD

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GEORGE C. MCGHEE, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO GERMANY
interviewed by
Martin J. Hillenbrand, Minister, American Embassy, Bonn
August 13, 1964

Minister Hillenbrand: You might want to begin, Mr. Ambassador, with some general observations as to how you would propose to proceed.

Ambassador McGhee: Unfortunately, I have no notes with me here in Germany covering the period of my association with the President. As a consequence, I am handicapped in not being able to recreate the precise background situation, the times and the statements made by President Kennedy in reference to the matters to which I will refer. Since notes were taken by others in most of the meetings I attended with the President, which will be more reliable than my memory, I will not attempt to recreate what was said by the President and others on such occasions. I will, however, attempt to give my impression of the particular ideas, policies and directives of the President, concerning which I might have some particular insight because of what transpired between myself and the President.

Minister Hillenbrand: I understand that you would prefer to begin with the subject of the Congo. Do you have any general observations, with particular reference as to how this question was handled in the Executive and as to the personal role of the President?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes, I might begin with the Congo because I worked on this problem longer and in closer contact with the President than perhaps any other one problem. Immediately upon my appointment as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, I was assigned responsibility within the Department, under the Under Secretary and Secretary,

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Minister Hillenbrand: I understand that you feel you have something to add on the subject of the removal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

Ambassador McGhee: Yes. One of the initial acts of the President was to ask Mr. Acheson to study NATO policy in general. I participated as a member of Mr. Acheson's supporting committee. One of the particular recommendations of the report concerned the removal of the MRBM's -- the Jupiters -- from Turkey and Italy. At one of the meetings dealing with this problem, the President turned to me, presumably because of my experience in Turkey, and asked me if I thought the Turks would permit us to take the MRBM's out. I replied that I doubted it, but that we could go into the matter thoroughly and see what could be done. As a result, we studied the matter and got the advice of the Embassy in Ankara. When the Secretary and I were in Ankara shortly thereafter, at the CENTO meeting, we talked with the Foreign Minister of Turkey about the MRBM's. His reaction was sharply against their removal. The Turks had put a good deal of money into the installation of the Jupiters, which had just come into place. According to the Foreign Minister it would be difficult for the Turkish people to understand their removal without any compensating additions to their security. As a result I had to report to the President that, in my opinion, the Turks would not agree to the removal of the MRBM's without some compensation or stronger pressure than would be justified at that time.

Much later, the Jupiters were removed, but only when we were able to put Polaris submarines into the Mediterranean. It would have been preferable if the President's original wish could have been carried out, since the removal of the MRBM's at the later date was widely, although wrongly, interpreted as a consideration paid by us for the removal of offensive Soviet missiles from Cuba.

Minister Hillenbrand: What was the underlying rationale in the Acheson Report for the removal of the Jupiters at that relatively earlier period?

Ambassador McGhee: Basically, it was felt that these weapons, as "soft" weapons, were vulnerable to a first attack and would be a liability instead of an asset. In the event of a nuclear attack they would draw immediate enemy fire, since they would have to be put out. There would be little opportunity for them to have ever been effective as second strike weapons. Moreover, they were, because of their location, unusually provocative to the Soviets. Their disadvantage appeared to outweigh their strategic value.

Minister Hillenbrand: You have indicated you would like next to turn to the subject of Laos and South Vietnam. Do you have any general observations to begin with?

Ambassador McGhee: Before the Kennedy Administration came into office, I had been working with Secretary-designate Rusk helping prepare him and the President for the time when they would assume office. The question to which I devoted particular attention was Laos. A "shadow" inter-departmental committee had been organized, which I chaired, to make recommendations to the President as to the policy he should pursue in Laos. Our report was presented to him and he accepted it, as I recall, in its entirety, with the exception of one recommendation. As a counterpoise to the intrusions of the Viet Cong into Laos, we had recommended that he send troops to Thailand. Although this step was later taken, when the situation in Laos became more acute, he declined to do it at this time. I assume that he did not wish to take such a provocative step so early in his Administration. As a consequence, although we stepped up our effort in Laos, we made no spectacular